

Brand X Case Heard by Supreme Court

From BBP Wires

Washington, DC — The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the Brand X case March 29. Justices questioned why the FCC classified cable modem broadband as unregulated, while it regulates DSL services provided by telephone companies. Brand X Internet LLC, Earthlink and other ISPs are arguing that DSL and cable should be treated alike, and that broadband customers would benefit from competition.

If they win, they will be able to buy bandwidth from cable companies, probably lowering prices to consumers but reducing the incentive of cable companies to expand their networks.

That, in turn, could reduce the incentive of telephone companies to install fiber to compete. See BBP January, page 20, and February, page 38, for details of the case.

The justices asked how cable companies could argue that broadband access and Internet functionality are inseparable from TV service as a matter of technology. In the telephone world, they can be separated. The FCC has already ordered ILECs to unbundle their services and sell

access to their (non-fiber-to-the-home) broadband networks to competing ISPs.

On behalf of the FCC, Department of Justice lawyer Thomas Hungar said the FCC had the authority to separate cable modem service from telecommunication.

Thomas Goldstein, representing Brand X and the other ISPs, disagreed. He said the FCC had no legal grounds for treating the telephone companies differently from the cable companies with regard to unbundling, basically allowing cable modem providers to avoid regulation by not offering a separate, stand-alone broadband service.

“Congress could not have intended carriers to deregulate themselves simply by adding some [Internet] service,” he said. But Paul Cappuccio, representing the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, said it is impossible to separate Internet and broadband functionality in cable modem service.

The justices varied in their questions. Several of the justices appeared to be uncomfortable about two competing industries being regulated differently.

“I think you can just as intelligently say it for [telephone] wire as you can for cable,” said Justice David Souter, addressing an explanation by Cappuccio of why the industry was not obligated to share its networks with ISPs.

Justice Antonin Scalia said the cable industry’s argument was like that of an automobile parts vendor who requires customers to purchase car windshields when all they want are new windshield wipers.

Justice Stephen Breyer compared cable modem service to voice mail, which he said is like e-mail but is associated with a highly regulated telecommunication service. He said, “I keep thinking of my answering machine and it doesn’t seem that much different.” He questioned if the court should overrule the FCC.

“I don’t know how broadband services will be offered 20 years from now,” he said. “There could be wireless. People could be broadcasting using their teeth. Why not leave it to the FCC?”

A ruling is expected before the court session ends for the summer in late June. ♦

Interest in FSO and E-Band Broadband

BBP Staff

New York — Judging from installation and new product announcements, there’s a renewed interest in broadband links using high-capacity infrared “Free Space Optics” and the newly available millimeter wavelength E-band (with operating frequencies of 71-75, 81-86, and 92-95 GHz), which was cleared for this use by the FCC only last year. We’ve been covering the key developments in the past few months, but one event at a time. We’ll be exploring these technologies in a more orderly fashion in the months ahead.

The two technologies seem to be syn-

ergistic, expanding the opportunities for both. Both technologies are capable of reliable transmission well above 1 Gbps. There’s a decade of design experience with FSO infrared. It’s most cost-effective for bridging distances of less than a mile and bandwidths below 1.5 Gbps. E-band will go to 10 Gbps and up to 4 miles.

Neither is totally immune to ambient conditions, but conservatively designed systems from Canon have withstood blinding rain in Southern California this spring, and hurricane pounding in Florida last fall. E-band units are oper-

ating in New York City – where nothing is easy – and have been chosen by such demanding customers as Donald Trump to link building-wide LANs to the outside world. Prices have also been falling while reliability has been improving due to better optics, self-aligning platforms, and clever ideas for easier maintenance.

The technology helps enable quick implementation of fiber, by bridging difficult terrain and by providing an active backup route for broadband, or an emergency fix when fiber is disrupted by fire, earthquake, or a contractor’s backhoe equipment. ♦

Global Sonora Design License Expires

BBP Staff

Tallahassee — Sonora Design Associates is no longer allowed to sell products using four patents licensed from Global Communications, Inc. The patents relate to stacking or de-stacking of satellite signals in the 950-1450 MHz range to form a continuous 950-2150

MHz signal that can be distributed on a single cable. Tallahassee-based Global revoked the license agreement on October 6, 2004, but Sonora and its distributors were given six months to clear existing products from inventory.

Global did settle a patent suit it

brought against DirecTV recently. As part of the settlement, DirecTV received an exclusive license to a patent relating to flexible mapping of transponder signals for efficient delivery within single-family homes and MDUs. ♦

Vonage Sued in Texas Over Missed 911 Call

From BBP Wires

Houston — How much notice is enough? Vonage was sued last month by the State of Texas, after Joyce John, during a house-breaking at her parents' home, failed to reach 911 on a VoIP Vonage phone.

John said she tried to call 911 as burglars threatened and then shot her parents. Texas Attorney-General Greg Abbott says her parents, who survived the shooting, were under the impression they had 911 service.

A voice recording told her their phone

line did not have access to 911. The lawsuit alleges that Vonage failed to make it clear to consumers when they sign up that they don't automatically have the ability to use 911.

Vonage notes that it informs customers on its Web site about how VoIP 911 service differs from 911 on regular phones. Also, a disclaimer about 911 appears on-screen as clients agree to the terms of service.

Vonage users can get 911, but must

enter their address on the Web site. Users also get e-mail reminders if they don't activate 911.

At issue in the suit is whether Vonage could have tried any harder, or whether John's parents' 911 signup could have been made automatic, since the firm obviously knows at least the billing address of its subscribers.

Some VoIP providers use that approach, making 911 service automatic for their subscribers. ♦

Riverstone Networks' Ethernet Routers Get USDA Rural Utilities Service Listing

From BBP Wires

Santa Clara — Riverstone Networks, a leading provider of Carrier Ethernet Networks, has received USDA Rural Utilities Service listing for both its RS and Riverstone 15000 product lines, making it the first vendor of MPLS-based Ethernet routers to do so.

A RUS listing permits Independent Operating Companies and Rural Local Exchange Carriers (RLECs) to deploy these products using RUS Broadband Loan and Grant programs.

Riverstone equipment is used in the Utopia project, the largest planned in-

dependent FTTH deployment in the nation. It was described in BBP for January.

The RUS loan program is designed to increase the rate of broadband deployments to communities of up to 20,000 inhabitants, giving rural consumers a chance at the same range of communications services that are available in urban and suburban communities.

"Broadband connectivity is a big issue for the nation's 1,000 rural operators, and naturally many are looking to

Ethernet as a solution," said Michael Howard, principal analyst at Infonetics Research.

"Even though life in a small town might be slower, that doesn't mean the Internet has to be," said Dan Middleton, Vice President, North American Sales, Riverstone Networks.

Riverstone's Ethernet router portfolio allows carriers to offer new services over existing revenue-generating networks permitting them to evolve to a next-generation Ethernet infrastructure. ♦

Coaxsys Announces Twentieth Telco Customer for TVnet: Panhandle Telephone

From BBP Wires

Los Gatos — Coaxsys, a leader in delivering customer premise networking over existing wires, signed its 20th telco customer last month after only a few months of product deployment. Panhandle Telephone will be using Coaxsys TVnet to deploy Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) to its video subscribers in northwest Oklahoma.

Coaxsys' proprietary TVnet technology turns a home's existing coaxial cable infrastructure into a high-speed, IPTV-ready digital entertainment network. TVnet is an alternative to costly Cat5 re-wiring; its relatively low cost and simple plug-and-play installation let telcos deliver IPTV over existing coaxial wiring.

Panhandle Telephone, with 14,000 subscribers, will deliver IPTV services and complete its "triple play" of voice, video, and data.

"Our mission is to provide state-of-the-market technologies to meet our customers' growing needs," said Panhandle CEO Ron Strecker. "We have been clamoring for a cost-effective way to deliver IPTV over existing wires. Coaxsys' TVnet is the only product that has actually worked without complications, and we are ecstatic to be able to offer our customers IPTV without a lengthy and costly home rewire."

TVnet delivers up to 104 Mbps and supports distances up to 250 feet. TVnet

is also compatible with TV splitters and supports Ethernet unicast, multicast, and broadcast. Once connected to the video or broadband source, TVnet adapters transform the entire home's coaxial cable into a series of network-enabled coax jacks.

TVnet adapters can then be connected to any network-enabled device in order to provide Internet access, share peripherals, or stream high quality, digital audio and video (including multi-channel and HDTV).

Established in 2002, Coaxsys is headquartered in Los Gatos, California. For more information, visit their website at www.coaxsys.com. ♦

Caspian Networks Debuts Compact, High-Density A50 Flow-State Router

BBP Staff

San Jose — Caspian Networks, a leading supplier of high performance flow-state routers, released its 50 Gbps dual-duplex A50 at the end of March. It can accept up to four 10 Gbps interface cards in a single six rack-unit shelf. It has all the functionality of the bigger A120 router, but accepts fewer interface cards. The line and processor cards for both models are the same, so they can be reused if the bigger unit is needed in the future.

Unlike traditional routers, the A50 is able to recognize and route traffic as flows of related packets, not just as individual packets, to control traffic more effectively. Based on the industry's first implementation of actual IP "flow state" in hardware, the A50 flow-state router gives service providers the ability to optimize peering interfaces, implement P2P traffic control, improve the performance of broadband access networks and create an effective and

efficient infrastructure for voice and video over IP as well as other real-time services.

Flow control routers prioritize interactive traffic. The methods vary, but the idea is to identify the flows that are static (such as inbound video), from their VLAN ID, source and designation, 802.1 pbit and so forth. Caspian has proprietary technology to smooth flows of packets that are not marked, such as a Skype phone call, by looking at the flow characteristics -- for example by how long the flow has lasted, or its average packet length, or average rate.

All that takes a lot of computing power. Software would be too slow, so Caspian uses custom ASICs (Application-Specific Integrated Circuits).

Its equipment can handle 2 million flows per second in each chip and 5 million flows in each 10 Gbps interface card. Fifteen ASICs in a fully populated A50 require just 800 watts.

Like the A120, the A50 supports a variety of optical interfaces, including 1/10 Gigabit Ethernet, OC-192c/STM-64c, OC-48c/STM-16c, and OC-12c/STM-4c. The A50 supports BGP4, IS-IS, and OSPF routing and signaling protocols, with optional support for MPLS, RSVP-TE, LDP, PIM-SM, MBGP and IPv6.

The firm sees the A50 used at network aggregation points, at DSL central offices, cable headends, metro areas, and large apartment buildings.

The QoS specs are high enough for use with financial institutions on the network.

A base system configuration starts at \$50,000 plus the cost of additional line cards.

Caspian Networks is based in San Jose, California with offices in North Carolina, the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea and China. For more information, see them at www.caspian.com. ♦

Top Seven Intelligent Communities of 2005

BBP Staff

Honolulu — The Intelligent Community Forum has named the world's Top Seven Intelligent Communities of 2005.

The Top Seven, announced at the Pacific Telecommunications Council conference in Honolulu, were selected from a group of 18 finalists from around the world.

The seven automatically became the fi-

nalists for the Intelligent Community of the Year award, which will be presented in June.

The Top Seven of 2005 are:

Issy-les-Molineaux, France
Mitaka, Japan
Pirai, Brazil
Singapore

Sunderland, UK
Taipei
Tianjin, China

The New York City-based Intelligent Community Forum, a World Teleport Association project, can be reached via their website at www.intelligentcommunity.org. ♦

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